User Guide

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Milton Keynes Community Transport

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MK PlusBus

Introduction

The PlusBus service is aimed at those people who find it difficult to use the local bus service. It offers door-to-door transport, using accessible vehicles and trained drivers.

The service works on a membership basis, so you need to register for PlusBus before you can make a booking. There is no charge for registering; forms can be requested by calling our main Bookings Line or by emailing us. When returning forms, which are A4 in size, please ensure you fold them in half or use stamps for “large letters”.

PlusBus is aimed at those people who find it difficult to use the local bus service

JOINING…

Individuals who meet one of the following criteria can automatically join PlusBus; other people may apply, but will need to provide further information.

- Those aged over 80
- Those who have already been issued a disabled blue badge
- Those who are registered blind
- Those who receive War Pensions Mobility Supplement *or* the **higher rate** of the Attendance Allowance / the Mobility Component of DLA.

Bookings

Our main Bookings Line (**01908 266950**) is open from 9am to 3pm on weekdays, but not bank holidays. When you phone us to make any sort of booking, you'll need to tell us the following information;

- Your full name
- The date(s) on which you want to travel
- Where you're travelling from
- Where you're travelling to - if possible, please have the postcode available
- Whether you're travelling with an escort
- Whether you'll be taking a trolley or any mobility aids for the trip (e.g. scooter, wheelchair, frame)

There are two types of booking - casual and regular. These are each explained on the next two pages.

Please remember that PlusBus only operates within the Milton Keynes Council area, and that all bookings are for individuals. If you need to travel as a group, you may wish to consider using our Group Transport service, for which a separate User Guide is available.

Bookings can also be made by emailing
transport@mkct.org.uk

Casual Bookings

A casual booking is for a one-off trip, and can be booked up to 7 days in advance. Please note that you need to call at least one working day before you want to travel; we can't usually take bookings for the same day.

Casual bookings are for one-off trips, maybe to meet a friend, or to go for an appointment.

When a casual booking request is made, the details are passed onto our schedulers, who will work on allocating the journey to a bus and driver later on that day. Hopefully, a journey will be found and the trip scheduled; if this can't be done, the trip will be left on the waiting list - see page 7.

You'll receive a call back either way, normally by 8pm that evening, to let you know the outcome.

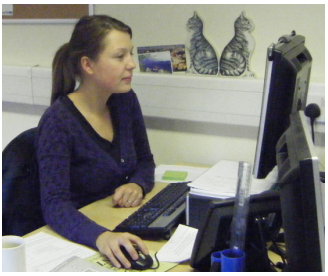
Requests for casual bookings can be accepted up to 7 days in advance

BOOKINGS LIMIT…

Please note that there is a limit to the number of booking requests we can take each day. This is due to the high demand for the service, and the fact that each booking can take quite some time to look at and schedule. Requests are taken on a "first come, first served" basis, so whilst the phones are busiest around 9am, the earlier you call, the more chance you have of being able to make a booking request.

Regular Bookings

A regular journey is one that happens each week, with the same pick-up slot and destination every week. It has the advantage that the customer knows when to expect their vehicle and they only have to phone up to cancel a trip. The journey will happen automatically each week otherwise.



Regular journey requests are dealt with once a month; this is due to the volume of requests and the time it takes to process them. **New regular journeys start from the 1st of each month, and the deadline for requesting a trip is the 17th of the previous month.** For example, a customer who wants a trip to start at the beginning of November would need to request it no later than the 17th of October.

Please note that any new regular trip will be confirmed in writing, and that you'll need to make casual bookings if you want to travel before confirmation of your regular trip is received.

Regular trips can only be weekly, and must be to the same destination each week. We can't help with fortnightly or monthly bookings, unfortunately.

Door-to-door

PlusBus is a door-to-door service. This means that when a driver arrives to collect you, he or she will knock at the front door* and help you to the vehicle.

They will also ensure you reach your destination safely, if it's a private house, community centre, or similar (for shopping trips, we'll drop you at the agreed point).

On a return journey, please wait by the entrance of the building, or your agreed pick-up point, and the driver will again help you to and from the bus. Please note you're not asked to wait outside for the bus at any location that has no shelter available.

** At Lovat Fields, drivers will only be able to collect passengers from the main reception and help them back to this point, due to the size of the building.*

The driver will help you to and from the bus

SHOPPING TRIPS

If you need to do a lot of shopping, you're asked to take a shopping trolley with you (remember this needs to be booked). If you need to use individual shopping bags, you're asked not to bring more than can be stored immediately around your seat. Realistically, this means that no customer should have more than four small bags.

The Waiting List

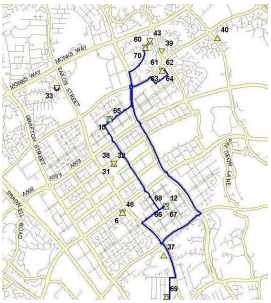
Unfortunately, there is more demand for PlusBus than there is capacity. This means that each day some trips will be placed on the waiting list, because we can't find a journey when it's requested.

About 20% of booked journeys are cancelled, maybe due to the individual being ill or having made other plans, and a lot of these cancellations are received at short notice. Each day, we therefore look at journeys on the waiting list for the next day, and if a journey has become possible, due to other cancellations, we'll contact you to let you know the times. Please note that if your booking request is on the waiting list and you don't hear from us, then we still don't have a trip available.

If you've requested a regular journey, and we can't offer you a regular slot, we can put it on the waiting list each week automatically. This means that if, on one particular week, we can offer you a trip, we'll contact you - but there won't necessarily be the same trip available the following week, as the availability is due to other users cancelling.

It's quite possible the trip you're offered won't be at the times you've requested; this is because PlusBus is extremely busy. We appreciate any flexibility you can show with regard to times, and this will help us to offer you - and others - a trip.

Routes



We use a sophisticated computer scheduling package to plan routes and shifts, and this has helped us to increase the number of trips we accommodate - from around 1,200 per week when PlusBus was launched, to well over 2,000 just two years later!

Sometimes there are queries about the routes that are followed. There may be reasons for particular routes that aren't obvious (for example, restrictions on the times we can get to certain places), and also there are many different ways to get between two points in Milton Keynes. The route that seems the most sensible to one person may be very different from the route another person would choose!

PlusBus has increased from 1,200 to over 2,000 trips per week!

DESTINATIONS

PlusBus can serve destinations anywhere within the Milton Keynes Council area. This includes the main city area, as well as Olney, Hanslope and Woburn Sands. Unfortunately, we're unable to go beyond the MK Council boundaries, and this means we don't serve Newton Longville, Old Stratford or Deanshanger.

Pick-up Slots

All PlusBus bookings are confirmed for a 20-minute slot, for example “from 10am to 10:20am”. This means that you need to be ready at 10am (i.e. with your coat, keys, etc to hand, although we’re not asking you to stand outside or similar), and the bus will arrive between 10am and 10:20am. This flexibility is one of the reasons why we’ve been able to increase the number of passengers we take, as it allows the exact time to move (within the confirmed slot), depending on other bookings and cancellations.

Some passengers find the 20-minute slot a little confusing, but please just bear in mind the following simple points;

- You need to be ready at the earlier of the two times.
- The bus will arrive at some point between these two times. It won’t necessarily be at the earlier time.
- The driver may not be able to wait if you’re not ready

Buses should not arrive before the start of your slot; if this should happen, the driver will certainly be happy to wait until the start of the slot, and should it happen regularly you’re asked to let us know.

Phone Numbers

Our main Bookings Line is **01908 266950**, and this is open from 9am to 3pm. It does get very busy at times, however we'll do our best to answer your call as quickly as possible.

There is a Customer Hotline (**01908 266954**), which you can call if your bus hasn't arrived by the end of your confirmed slot, or if you've travelled out with PlusBus and have missed your return trip. We can then help you with these urgent issues.

The Customer Hotline cannot be used for general enquiries (including lost property, checking times, etc) or bookings; please help us to keep this line available for genuine operational problems.

We'll do our best to answer your call as quickly as possible

01908 266950
bookings (9am to 3pm)

01908 266954
hotline (anytime*)

01908 266955
cancellations (anytime)

* for urgent operational problems only

Cancellations

We understand that passengers will often need to cancel trips, perhaps because of illness or needing to change their plans. This isn't a problem, however it's important that you let us know in advance if you need to cancel. This will often allow trips to be offered to other people who are on the waiting list.

If you need to cancel a trip, please call us as far ahead as possible (up to 7 days in advance) and tell us your name and the date you wish to cancel for. Our Cancellations Line will often go to an answerphone, and if this happens you're asked just to leave a brief message after the beep. We're sorry if the answerphone is confusing, but please don't speak until after the beep, and do leave your name - we get quite a lot of messages without names, which are rather hard to deal with!

Please note that you can also cancel a trip by emailing us, to **transport@mkct.org.uk**.

Due to how our booking system operates, we can only take cancellations up to 7 days in advance, and journeys can't be cancelled "until further notice". If you're unlikely to be travelling for over a month, you may need to cancel your regular trip and then request a new one once you can travel again.

Vehicles

The vehicles that normally provide PlusBus services are in a distinctive green livery and are fitted with a tail-lift, allowing them to take wheelchairs and scooters.

Occasionally a white vehicle, like the one to the right, or even an orange bus will be used instead.

All of our vehicles are maintained to the same standard, in our own workshop. Each bus is inspected once every six weeks, and basic daily checks are undertaken by our team of Fleet Assistants, who also keep the vehicles looking clean.

As of December 2008, fares were £2 return or £1.10 single

FARES…

The money collected in fares on PlusBus is returned to Milton Keynes Council and contributes towards the cost of the service (although it only covers about 10% of the total cost). Fares are payable by every passenger (including escort) and should be paid in cash on boarding. We cannot accept cheques or advance payment.

Priorities?

There are often questions about whether there is any priority system that applies to PlusBus. The simple answer is “no” - all casual bookings are taken on a first come, first served basis; there is no prioritisation of regular journeys either.

We appreciate that people travel for different reasons, and there are often suggestions that medical trips, for example, should be given priority. There are many issues involved and these are all sensitive questions, however at present all requests are treated equally.

Mobility

For every booking, we assign a mobility to the passenger, so that we know how much space to allow on the vehicle. When you make a booking, you’ll therefore be asked what your mobility for the trip is, using the following categories;

- Walking passenger with **no** frame, trolley, or similar
- Walking passenger with a frame, trolley or similar
- Wheelchair-user or scooter-user

Please note that if you’re using a wheelchair or scooter and you know that this is a small design, it helps if you can let us know when you book. We appreciate it’s difficult to judge the size of a wheelchair/scooter, however a normal manual wheelchair or 3-wheel scooter would be considered as being of a small design, for booking purposes.

Drivers

We employ around 30 drivers, on both full and part time contracts. Each driver completes their MiDAS training course before starting work (this is a nationally-recognised scheme, covering driving skills, use of equipment and customer care), as well as a full company induction programme. This includes time spent with experienced drivers, to help learn the area and get to know customers.

All our drivers carry ID badges and wear uniform, and are there to help customers. They aim to treat passengers with courtesy and respect, and the same approach is expected of users in return.

In the 2008 customer survey, 99% of replies rated drivers as good or excellent!

OPERATING TIMES…

On weekdays, PlusBus operates from 8am to 10pm. At weekends, the service is available between 8:40am and 5pm.

Please note there is not normally a bank holiday service, and that over Christmas the arrangements generally change. This includes both booking periods and the times at which PlusBus operates.

Full buses?

One of the most common questions that's asked about PlusBus is "why aren't the buses always full"? There are many reasons why they aren't, but the main point is that it's often time that limits us rather than space on the bus. A bus may have a spare seat, for example, but if it were to take an extra ten minutes to collect and drop off an additional customer, the driver may not have time to do that without becoming late for the next passenger, who could then be late for their doctor's appointment or similar.

Feedback

We're always happy to hear views from users, and we aim to record all comments that are made over the phone, even if these aren't expressed formally. We try to respond to both verbal and written comments within seven days.

We're also able to visit groups or individuals, to talk about the PlusBus service and to answer any questions.

Each year, we carry out a full customer survey, with forms being sent to all registered members by post. Whilst this focuses on our overall service (i.e. not just PlusBus) it gives a good indication of what users think, and it also lets us ask questions that help to shape the service.

MKCT

MKCT is an equal partnership between Age Concern and Ealing Community Transport. We trade as a "social enterprise", basically meaning we don't have to make a profit for shareholders.

31 Burners Lane
Kiln Farm
Milton Keynes
MK11 3HA

Bookings:
01908 266950
Cancellations:
01908 266955

AGE Concern Milton Keynes

ECT

making a difference

Other Services

Whilst PlusBus is the main service that MKCT provides, in terms of the number of vehicles and passengers, we also offer a range of other services. Some of these are listed below; please contact us for more information.

- **Day Trips…** during the summer months, we run trips to places of interest, using our normal accessible vehicles. Destinations have included Woburn Safari Park, London, Shuttleworth Air Museum, and the Seaside! Prices start from £8 per person.
- **Group Transport…** we're able to hire minibuses to local community groups for their own exclusive use. Prices start from £50 per vehicle for a return journey in MK.